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Development proposal draws concerns

Neighbors concerned over school crowding potential

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A proposed apartment complex at the intersection of Route 100 and Route 103 has some nearby resident concerned about the traffic impact at an already busy interchange.

Nearly 30 community members sat in on a presubmission meeting at the ElkrIDGE Volunteer Fire Department Nov. 19 to hear about a traffic study regarding the potential impact of The Park at Locust Thicket — a proposed 387-unit apartment complex.

The property owners are seeking to develop 15 acres across from Wesley Lane in ElkrIDGE, which are currently vacant.

Mike Ord and his wife, Marla, have lived off Wesley Lane for the past 10 years

and over that time, Mike Ord has seen rush hour traffic at the intersection of Routes 100 and 103 on his daily commute to work.

Ord and his neighbors believe the county and developers of the property need to be cognizant of public safety.

"There's going to be some potential for real bad accidents at that intersection," Ord said of a proposed traffic light at Route 103 and Wesley Lane.

Benchmark Engineering Inc., the property consultant, has held three presubmission meetings over the past year in advance of submitting plans to the county.

The sketch plan submitted to the county — the first plan required for county approval — currently proposes the 387 apartments within nine buildings on 15 acres. A previous version of the plan proposed only 315 units, but in the sketch plan stage of design, building layouts are revised multiple times.

Following an approval of the sketch plan, the property developer will also

need to submit preliminary, final and site development plans, which each must be approved by the county.

An environmental concept plan has also been submitted to the county, but has yet to be approved, according to the county planning and zoning department.

Over the course of the three presubmission meetings, Ord said community participation has increased and the community has become more vocal.

Representatives from now-County Executive Allan Kittleman and County Councilman Calvin Ball's office were also in attendance Nov. 19.

After learning of the latest traffic proposal to ease congestion at the busy intersection, Ord said no one in the community has "an ounce of faith in what they put up on the screen" for their traffic projections.

"It was good to see them thinking about innovative ways to make the intersection better," he said. "That's good, but there is a lot of skepticism."

One innovative way proposed to alleviate traffic in the area is a dividing interchange, something that would be the second of its kind in the state — the other is in Arundel Mills.

Community members at the Nov. 19 meeting also voiced concerns over potential enrollment increases at Bellows Spring Elementary School — located directly behind the proposed development site.

According to the Howard County Public School System's website, the school capacity is 762 and the enrollment in prekindergarten through fifth grade is 731.

After Ducketts Lane Elementary School opened in 2013 and alleviated some of the crowding issues at Bellows Spring, Ord said community members are concerned this development project will bring additional crowding concerns to the elementary school.

"We know it's going to push Bellows back up over capacity again," Ord said.